

## *Progressive Christianity Statement*

1-15-23

Progressive Christianity is a recent movement within the Christian Church that is permeating worship music, children's curriculum, sermons and books. Proponents of Progressive Christianity include Tony Campolo, Richard Rohr, Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Tim Mackie (The Bible Project) and Jen Hatmaker.

Many Christian universities have also fallen prey to progressive ideologies. Students graduating from these institutions often go through what they refer to as "deconstructing their faith," which is a rejection of the sound, biblical doctrine they grew up with and replacing it theologically progressive tenets.

What makes Progressive Christianity so potent is that it preys on the naïve or biblically illiterate Christians, those who yearn to be accepted by the culture, their tribe or peer group, using biblical concepts and even redefining biblical phrases.

The White Horse Inn, a website for conservative theology, writes:

*"Progressive Christianity is a movement that seeks to re-interpret the Bible, re-assess historic doctrines, and re-define core tenets of the faith. While claiming the title 'Christian,' and boasting a high view of the Bible, it is sweeping up many unsuspecting Christians into a false view of who God is and how he saves people."*

Michael Kruger, an author and professor at Montclair State University, wrote:

*"what makes Progressive Christianity so challenging is that it is a master class in half-truths that sound appealing on the surface until you dig down deeper and really explore their foundations and implications."*

We have identified four primary ways in which progressive ideology strays from scripture.

*Four Tenets of Progressive Christianity:*

### **1. The rejection of the Bible's authority.**

On the website, ProgressiveChristianity.org, a website dedicated to the "spiritual networking and resources for an evolving faith," they describe:

*"We affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey."*

They believe parts of the bible may be inspired but other parts are not. They also believe that the concepts or principles may be inspired but not the actual words of scripture.

The Reverend Gretta Vosper, a pastor of a progressive church in Canada, was asked by one of her congregants what bible translation she recommends for a progressive Christian. She responded:

*"I am fortunate to work with a congregation that challenges me to choose readings for each Sunday that are not from the Bible. We use texts that offer us the opportunity to explore major issues related to being human. They come from ancient and modern literature, poetry and pop culture, movie scripts and love letters."*

The website for the United Methodist Church, a increasingly progressive denomination, states:

*"we embrace the many variations of the view expressed by many great Christian thinkers that we take the bible too seriously to read it all literally."*

In defense of biblical authority, Alisa Childers, a critic of progressive Christianity and author of LIVE YOUR TRUTH AND OTHER LIES and ANOTHER GOSPEL, wrote:

*"In the progressive church, the Bible is viewed more like an ancient spiritual travel journal than the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. The Biblical writers are viewed as well-meaning ancient people who were doing their best to understand God in the times and places in which they lived, but they were not necessarily speaking for God. Scripture is also seen as contradictory, not internally coherent, and not authoritative for Christians."*

**At LVCC, we believe that the bible is authoritative and the sole source of God's revelation.**

**2 Peter 1:20–21 (NIV84)**

*<sup>20</sup> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

The phrase "**carried along**" is in the passive tense, meaning the authors were brought along, moved, or taken hold of by the Holy Spirit to write down what we have today as the 66 books of the canon.

We believe that when the bible isn't authoritative and absolute, we become the arbiter of truth. Our faulty wisdom and inconsistent feelings determine what is true and false. We become like Israel in Judges 21 "*all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.*" The bible warns us from placing ourselves as the arbiter of truth/authority.

**Proverbs 14:12 (NIV)**

*<sup>12</sup> There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.*

It all boils down to authority. Once you've denied bible's authority, you place yourself in the seat of authority. We believe that the Bible claims unique authority as the sole revelation of a holy God.

## **2. The acceptance of all religions and lifestyles.**

Again, the site ProgressiveChristianity.org writes:

*"We seek community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics, Believers and agnostics, Women and men, all sexual orientations and gender identities, all classes and abilities."*

*"The Christian faith is our way of being faithful to God, but it is not the only way. Christianity is the truth for us, but it is not the only truth. Exclusivity is born out of fear. We share our lives with people who are Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist. We experience these people as loving and caring by following their religious traditions. To deny that is to deny that God can only draw people with one way."*

The idea here is that to disagree with someone's religion or lifestyle is to do violence, to reject, or to hate someone. They equate love with embracing each other's truth.

Bethel Church, a progressive church in Beaverton, Oregon, lists common catch phrases of the movement: Inclusive, affirming, welcoming and accepting. These phrases on the surface sound biblical but they've repurposed them to mean "to agree with or ally with." Progressive Christianity is not just inclusive of person, but inclusive of lifestyle, orientations, sexuality and gender identities. This puts pressure on Christians that in order to follow Jesus' mandate of loving your neighbor (Matthew 19:19), you must affirm their desires and "truths", and reject the notion of absolute truth. To speak a truth that contradicts theirs is hateful and unloving, and therefore, un-Christlike.

**At LVCC, we believe that the bible states that genuine love speaks the truth which sometimes divides.**

### ***John 15:20 (NIV)***

*<sup>20</sup> Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*

Jesus warns us often in the New Testament of how our faith is antithetical to this world, and that trying to be accepted and liked by our world compromises truth and is antithetical to our devotion to Him.

Biblical truth, by nature, is divisive. The moment we mask, dilute, or change Jesus' words in order to be liked/accepted, we haven't entered a genuine relationship, we've entered a pseudo-relationship, one not marked by genuine love.

**1 Corinthians 13:6 (NIV)**

*<sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*

Biblical Christianity affirms that the most loving thing you can do is tell someone the truth. Sometimes truth divides. If truth isn't spoken, then sin isn't acknowledged. If sin isn't acknowledged, then there is no repentance. If there is no repentance, there can be no salvation in Christ. The bible speaks of a love that tells the truth, even if it divides.

### **3. The mandate for social justice as the ultimate Christian virtue.**

Patheos, a website supporting progressive theology, states:

*"Today, Progressive Christianity is a dynamic movement within the Christian faith that is marked by a willingness to question tradition, a tolerance of diversity, and an emphasis on social justice and environmental advocacy."*

Progressive Christianity teaches that a Christian's primary responsibility is to defend disadvantaged people groups and to fight for social causes adversely affecting our world. This emphasis on social justice has many Christians locking arms with major social justice movements that are not biblical, such as Black Lives Matter in fighting racism, radical feminism in resisting abusive patriarchal structures, Planned Parenthood in defending a women's right to choose and radical environmentalist movements in fighting climate change.

Progressive Christianity has at its roots, an unbiblical theology called "collective salvation," which is the belief that Jesus did not come to save a sinner from their sin, but to restore society to an ideal socioeconomic utopia.

David Young, a conservative pastor in Tennessee, writes:

*"Progressives tend to focus on social justice to the exclusion of the Gospel. The Gospel is not about God making paradise of this world, but God raising us into a new heaven and earth. When social justice replaces the Gospel, you won't get the Gospel, but you also won't get justice."*

They even go so far as labeling Christians who don't participate in social justice causes as uncaring, immature and insensitive. Voddie Baucham, a conservative pastor/speaker and author of *FAULT LINES*, writes:

*"Those belonging to the social-justice crowd present themselves as the only ones pursuing justice, to the exclusion of all who disagree with their assessments—who, by that definition, are pursuing injustice. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the current struggle is that it mischaracterizes Christians that way too. On one side are*

*'compassionate' Christians who are 'concerned about justice.' On the other are 'insensitive' Christians who are 'not concerned about justice.' This is wrong."*

**At LVCC, we believe that the bible states that a person's greatest need is reconciliation with a holy God.**

***2 Corinthians 5:19-20 (NIV)***

*<sup>19</sup> ...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

Therefore, our primary message to a lost and fallen world is the hope that they can be reconciled to a holy God. Rearranging this world's goods, balancing the scales of inequities, righting the wrongs of racism and fighting for social justice does nothing to address that as a sinner we are under the wrath of God and will face eternal judgment. Our message isn't to create an earthly utopia. What good will that do other than allow sinners to enter eternal hell comfortably, well fed, and holding the reins of power on earth? ALL OF WHICH WILL CHANGE the moment a sinner steps before the judgment of a holy, just God without the atonement of Christ. The bible states clearly our greatest need is reconciliation, being at peace with a holy God!

#### **4. The denial of the atonement of Christ.**

The word "atonement" means to pay the debt or penalty of a crime or a sin. Progressive Christians reject the notion that God needs to be appeased because of our sin. They believe a loving God doesn't get angry, isn't filled with wrath and doesn't need to punish.

Tim Mackie, the narrator and co-producer of THE BIBLE PROJECT, mocks the biblical idea of atonement when he states:

*"God needs His pound of flesh in the name of His justice, so He's going to kill you because He's angry at you. But instead, He's going to kill Jesus. And He takes out His anger on Jesus, and then He allows you when you die to go to the good place and not the bad place so you can sing forever the praises of the God who didn't kill you...This is not consistent with the bible."*

Alisa Childers challenges this progressive tenet when she writes:

*"Often, progressive Christians will refer to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as horrific or unnecessary. The idea that God the Father would require the blood sacrifice of his Son is perceived to be an indictment on God's character, turning him into a divine abuser."*

**At LVCC, we believe that the bible says that Christ's atonement is God's just and loving response toward us.**

**1 John 4:10 (NIV)**

*<sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

We teach that God's greatest demonstration of love isn't answered prayer, keeping us safe or protecting us from bad things. We believe that the bible says his greatest demonstration of love is sending His own Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. To pay our debt we couldn't pay, so we can be reconciled to a Holy God. We also believe that Christ's atonement is God's way of acting justly.

**Romans 3:25 (NIV)**

*<sup>25</sup> God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness...*

If your view of sin isn't serious, or if your view of God isn't holy, you will never see the need for atonement. However, a biblical view of sin is total depravity, meaning that our thoughts, intentions, actions, words, even good deeds are corrupted by sin. A biblical view of God is that He is so far above us in every way, holy, perfect, morally consistent, never changes, has no shadows or inconsistencies.

If you have a tame view of your sin, there is no urgency for repentance, confession, holiness, or sanctification. If you have a low view of God, you have no God at all, it creates an elevated view of yourself. Progressive Christians not only minimize the penalty of sin, but they also have a low view of the holiness of God. The bible describes Christ's atoning work on the cross is God's greatest demonstration of love and justice for the sinner.

**Conclusion**

**Galatians 1:6–7 (NIV)**

*<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.*

Progressive Christianity is a "different gospel" preying on naïve and biblically illiterate Christians. Be on the lookout for these lies. Watch what your kids listen/watch/say! Don't assume a Christian band, author, pastor, speaker is biblical.

**1 Timothy 4:16 (NIV)**

*<sup>16</sup> Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

Sound doctrine is everything! What you believe matters! Your theology dictates your behavior! Your commitment to sound biblical doctrine will aid in the salvation of friends. May God by his grace, give us the courage to stand for biblical truth in our day!